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Subject: Superfund issue may dominate Tuesday's Animas River Stakeholders Group Meeting (Today's Durango Times Herald)

Superfund issue may dominate Tuesday's Animas River Stakeholders Group meeting

In spill's wake, Animas River group's meeting expected to be lively

By [Chase Olivarius-Mcallister](#) Herald staff writer

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Shaun Stanley/Durango Herald file photo

The Tuesday meeting of the Animas River Stakeholders Group at 6:15 in Silverton Town Hall is expected to center around whether abandoned mines around the town should be placed in the federal Superfund program.

The Animas River Stakeholders Group – an un-elected volunteer group that for two decades has been at the center of the debate about how to address the pollution gushing out of Silverton’s defunct mines – is to meet Tuesday for the first time since Gold King Mine spewed 3 million gallons of sludge downstream on Aug. 5.

While most of the group’s meetings take place during the day, this meeting will begin at 6:15 p.m. at Silverton Town Hall, making it easier for members of the public to attend.

The meeting comes at a time when the question of whether the Environmental Protection Agency should list Silverton’s oozing mines under Superfund has taken on new urgency for both downstream communities such as Durango and people in Silverton.

Facebook users have been planning to crash the meeting for weeks. Tom Newman, writing on The Durango Herald’s website, challenged others to attend in the wake of the Gold King blowout and go “person to person” to ask why Silvertonians still spurn Superfund designation.

Peter Butler, co-coordinator of the volunteer group, said while he was aware of online agitation, he did not know what would happen Tuesday or who would attend.

Unlike the Silverton Town Board or the San Juan County commissioners, the stakeholders' group has "no authority to compel anyone to do anything. We tend to be a fairly technically oriented group," he said.

The stakeholders group, which includes scientists, environmentalists, mining interests and government representatives, was founded in 1994 as an alternative to Superfund with the mission of improving water quality in the Animas through a "collaborative process."

Even in recent years, as pollution from Silverton-area mines worsened – killing 3 out of 4 fish species living in the Animas below Bakers Bridge – San Juan County officials resisted the EPA's warnings that the defunct mines needed to be placed under Superfund, saying they preferred working on the problem through the stakeholders' group.

But since the Gold King blowout, skeptics downstream and in Silverton have questioned whether a cleanup can be accomplished through the stakeholders' group – which counts representatives from Sunnyside Gold Corp., the last major mining company to operate in the area, and San Juan Corp., the owner of Gold King Mine, among its members.

Melody Skinner, a longtime Silvertonian, has started a petition effort demanding Superfund while longtime stakeholder group members such as John Ferguson continue to oppose Superfund and support addressing the area's defunct mines through the group.

In an email about the meeting, Peter Butler, co-coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders' Group, told the stakeholders: "I'm sure it will be quite interesting."

In an email, Silverton resident Bob Boeder said pro-mining, anti-Superfund voices in the stakeholders' group like Ferguson's "do not represent me or most people who live here."

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"Out of the long list of nature's gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil."
Hugh Hammond Bennett